



## **Texas School Safety Center, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute and Okay to Say partner for Safe Schools Week, October 21 - 25**

SAN MARCOS, TEXAS - The Texas School Safety Center (TxSSC), the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI), and MMHPI's award-winning Okay to Say™ mental health awareness campaign are partnering to promote the 2019 Texas Safe Schools Week, Oct. 21-25. The organizations share the mutual goals of ensuring that Texas children have safe and healthy learning environments and access to the mental health services they need to be academically successful.

"The definition of school safety has expanded to encompass both physical safety and mental wellness," says Kathy Martinez-Prather, Director of the Texas School Safety Center. "A key component of a holistic approach to school safety is the social and emotional well-being of our students."

Every year, nearly 2 million Texas school children have mental health needs, most of which are mild or moderate depression or anxiety that are readily addressable by families and their health professionals.

"Supporting the emotional wellness of Texas students with the research-driven supports they need can have a profound effect on their overall wellbeing and academic performance," said Andy Keller, PhD, president and CEO of the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. "Texas is making great strides to better equip educators and parents with the tools and resources they need to get students help when they need it. It is also essential that families and communities emphasize the importance of talking openly about mental health."

Half of mental illnesses emerge by age 14, with 75 percent beginning by the age of 24. Without treatment, students with mental health needs are at a greater risk of dropping out of school, engaging in substance use, and developing more severe mental health difficulties, putting them at higher risk of violence and suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people, and the rate nationally and in Texas is at historic levels.

Legislation promoting school safety, inclusive of mental health promotion initiatives, passed during the recent legislative session with over-whelming bipartisan support. In August, Governor Greg Abbott released "[Improving School Safety in Texas](#)," a report that highlights work by the 86th Legislature that "led to significant improvements in enhancing the safety of Texas schools, expanding students' access to mental health resources, and increasing support for teachers facing classroom challenges."

Throughout Safe Schools Week, The Texas School Safety Center, MMHPI, and Okay to Say will be sharing resources for educators, school-based law enforcement officers, and parents through their Facebook and Twitter pages.

The Texas School Safety Center is an official, university-level research center at Texas State University. The TxSSC offers online resources and in-person workshops to assist schools with emergency operations plan development, training and drilling, school threat assessment and management, bullying and suicide prevention, and other school safety topics. To learn more about the Texas School Safety Center and the resources it offers visit [txssc.txstate.edu](http://txssc.txstate.edu).

MMHPI is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to improve mental health services in Texas by bringing together diverse mental health resources and services to identify and affect the policies, practices, and recommendations that impact how health care is implemented. The Institute is working to shift the focus of new investments in mental health care toward early intervention. To learn more about the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute visit [www.texasstateofmind.org](http://www.texasstateofmind.org)

Okay to Say was launched by MMHPI and its partners in 2016 to increase awareness that most mental illnesses are treatable and to offer messages of hope and recovery to Texans and their families. To learn more about Okay to Say visit [www.okaytosay.org](http://www.okaytosay.org).

Texas Safe Schools Week is held annually in conjunction with the national America's Safe Schools Week.